ACCESS

Since 2004, Albany has delivered around 170 communications projects of varying nature and scale in fragile and conflicted affected states (FCAS) across Africa and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Eastern Europe and South Asia. To be able to do so, we draw on a diverse range of in-house practitioners, experts, mentors, instructors, training teams, technical services (e.g. audio-visual, printing etc.), legal assistance, fixers / logistics, and suppliers of equipment. The type of work we do can often be called down at short notice, and we have succeeded in the past in deploying rapidly to requests with high quality personnel (such as staffing a full communications team at the Geneva II peace talks in 2014 on an FCO contract).

The Albany business model involves a core team of in-house staff who are a mix of programme management specialists and thematic talent. All are aware of the emphasis placed on gender, conflict sensitivity and MEL, and there are a number of SMEs on retainer in order to drawdown expertise at short notice. Thus, the company directly employs a core team of highly experienced communications practitioners (blending programme delivery expertise with thematic delivery experience to ensure a comprehensive and complementary response) whose skills we supplement with people we hire on a per-project basis across a range of skills and disciplines. Our longevity relies strongly on our ability to recruit high calibre, cost-effective, and suitably qualified consultants for our projects, and on our extensive international network of subject matter experts and contacts in civil society and government across where we work. Additionally, our team members benefit from continuous learning and development opportunities, which serves to underpin institutional memory, capacity and flexibility. We are thus able to recruit effectively across a wide spectrum of competencies, thematically and functionally throughout this considerable international network. Furthermore, such a position enables us to secure value for money and cost-effectiveness.

We therefore invest considerable time, effort and resource in growing our network of people – finding, engaging and developing people we can trust, and who have the knowledge, experience, temperament, ethos and attitude needed to work in the challenging operating environments we serve. For example, a function within Albany serves to maintain and keep current networks and relationships even when no specific project is running, or is being bid on. Presently, we have focus (*inter alia*) on the Eastern Partnership countries, Syria, and Ethiopia. This is a cost-effective way of ensuring that even without a country office, Albany is able to deliver when the short order notice is given.

To quality assure the professionalism and experience of our staff, part of the vetting process to get on our roster of experts and consultants involves making clear the agreement of certain sine qua non before any scope of work is discussed, such as agreement to Codes of Conduct (which includes staff training and compliance on Gender, Do No Harm, Conflict Sensitivity, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), and Safeguarding), professional liability insurance, acceptance of safeguarding and Modern Slavery principles. Beyond this, staff are sensitised to whistleblowing mechanisms and procedures to raise or escalate SEA / safeguarding concerns. We also maintain an Equal Opportunities Policy. All of Albany's team members and individual consultants are cognisant of DFID's statement of priorities and expectations for suppliers, and are contractually required to respect Albany's own code of conduct. This has been updated to reflect greater CSSF emphasis on Supplier Code of Conduct, and the Civil Service Code of Conduct.

Our HR staff, working according to internationally approved management and performance standards, implement our practices and procedures for hiring consultants and providing them with the wherewithal to deploy, ranging from security support, travel and life support, to insurance and legal compliance. We conduct regular reviews of our consultant database, which is fully GDPR-compliant, to ensure we have access to a balance of skills, experience and knowledge appropriate to the scope of opportunities that regularly come up.

When it comes to vetting, all staff are considered and vetted to ensure that they do not compromise the impartiality or integrity of the project, the client, or ourselves. Depending on the particular case, we use a respected security company to conduct independent background checks, including through its legitimate access to police records and other databases as necessary. These results will be complemented by an open-source check conducted by the Albany team to ensure that a potential candidate's views, affiliations or history do not run counter to project goals, and the check will also flag SEA issues.

The following areas are represented in our consultant database:

Thematic Areas	Functional Areas	
Political / cultural / situational awareness	Analysis	Negotiation
Strategic communications	Media monitoring	Media production
Conflict analysis / sensitivity	Campaign planning	Webmaster and digital
Gender sensitivity	M&E	Camera and audio
Media development	Journalism	Interpreting/translating
Digital engagement	Copywriting	Behavioural analysis
Capacity building	Event management	Psychology/sociology
Monitoring and evaluation learning / results management	Training and mentoring	Polling and data science

Our in-house staff speak the major European languages and Ukrainian and Russian, and our extended database covers other languages including Arabic, Swahili, Somali, Dari and Pashto.

RECRUITMENT
As part of our ongoing staffing development to cover these areas effectively, Albany regularly interviews potential consultants in a two-stage process:

Stage 1: We identify candidates for their general suitability for employment, which includes assessing for experience, qualifications, and skills. Human Resources and Administration (HRA), who will make background checks and seek references.

Stage 2: For a specific project, a Human Resources (HR) Matrix is drawn up to identify personnel requirements. We identify candidates for specific project roles through interviews with the HRA and an Associate Director/Project Director/Manager to assess specific suitability of employment. Local staff may be interviewed by a trusted member of Albany's network and may be checked, if considered necessary, reasonable, practically possible and politically appropriate from the funder's perspective, with the funder and other agencies.

All SMEs sign a contract, NDA, or teaming agreement depending on circumstance, which clearly states the parameters of the relationship, the terms of their employment and job specification, including key performance indicators, feedback intervals and timelines. All consultants are expected to meet the same ethical and professional standards as our permanent staff, detailed under our established company policies, which either include or require familiarisation with: (1) a Code of Ethics; (2) the Supplier Code of Conduct; (3) the Civil Service Code and (4) a Code of Conduct on Corruption.
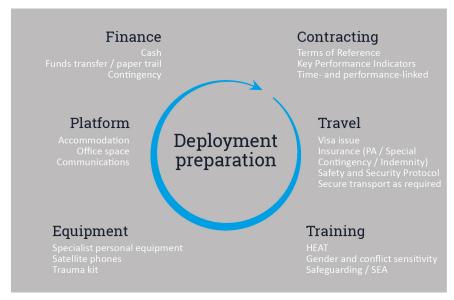
Local staffing
Typically, a range of general needs related to local / national knowledge and capability determines our recruitment of local staff. We access staff through competitive advertisement, or sometimes personal recommendation based on our networks of nationally based government and non-government (civil society) actors. We recruit according to national employment policies, and frequently employ local lawyers to ensure that the recruitment process is legal and compliant in the local context.

We commonly seek local skills and capabilities in the following areas: (i) Knowledge of local culture and tradition, including languages; (ii) Access to local government and civic leadership networks (tribal leaders, NGOs); (iii) Knowledge of government regulations and bureaucracy; (iv) Knowledge of local terrain, including safety and physical navigation factors.

MOBILISATION
Once staff selection is complete, preparation for deployment proceeds as depicted in this infographic:

Finance
Cash
Funds transfer / paper trail
Contingency

Contracting
Terms of Reference
Key Performance Indicators
Time- and performance-linked

Platform
Accommodation
Office space
Communications

Deployment preparation

Travel
Visa issue
Insurance (PA / Special Contingency / Indemnity)
Safety and Security Protocol
Secure transport as required

Equipment
Specialist personal equipment
Satellite phones
Trauma kit

Training
HEAT
Gender and conflict sensitivity
Safeguarding / SEA

Example of note?
Our processes are standardised, and all staffing is conducted according to the principles and processes outlined above. This essential given the need for indexing implementation against contextual risk to ensure the intervention's foundations are robust. The way in which we recruit, mobilse and maintain staff in various parts of the world can be illustrated as follows. Among others, we currently have a team of 15 in Ukraine, 5 consultants in Afghanistan, 2 consultants in Mogadishu, and a field office in Sudan. These are all different types of platforms requiring different approaches (e.g. higher staffing numbers in Ukraine, greater attention to security and life support in Mogadishu due to elevated threat levels, administrative oversight in Khartoum to ensure adherence to local laws and customs). In Yemen, such is the difficulty of access presently that our work in based out of Jordan, with in-country sub-contractors delivering the activities.

The upshot is: whether the implication of the type of work required is higher levels of administration to set it up, higher levels of attention and security for pre-deployment and mid-deployment phases, or higher levels of on-the-ground administration within a different legal and operational regime, our processes have been up to the task.